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Research Memorandum

RSB-179, November 16, 1962

F22

TO : The Secretary
THROUGH: S/S
FROM : INR - Roger Hilsman

Rog Hilsman

Via 3
Via 5

SUBJECT: Khrushchev Proposes United Nations Aegis for Western Forces in Berlin

Khrushchev has made another modification in the Soviet position on Berlin. He now is apparently prepared to accept the continued, if temporary, presence of Western forces in Berlin provided they are there under the aegis of the UN. This paper considers the implications of this change in the Soviet position.

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ABSTRACT

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The Soviet Union apparently calculated that Khrushchev's proposal is sufficiently attractive to draw the West into negotiations ostensibly directed toward reaching some form of Berlin agreement. In the immediate political situation the Soviets probably believe that they have much to gain by a mere US commitment to negotiate — they would win time to re-examine their own positions in the light of Cuban developments; they would create a climate which would tend to inhibit US freedom of action in other areas (most immediately in Cuba); and they would enhance their public posture as champions of world peace.

In terms of negotiations once they are under way, Moscow's new position affords the Soviets plenty of room for maneuver. The Soviets have in effect left themselves the choice of actually seeking a negotiated agreement if the West proves willing to meet Soviet terms or of causing the negotiations to bog down over one of the many issues which would have to be resolved before an agreement could be reached. In case the negotiations failed, Moscow probably believes that its initial forthcoming gesture would put the onus for the failure on the West.

The Soviets apparently are calculating that their announced "willingness to make concessions" in the interest of peace (as in the Cuban affair) can now be exploited in Berlin to induce parallel concessions from the Western side as a "fair exchange" for a peaceful settlement.

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The settlement which they appear to be aiming for at this point seems to be one of an interim nature which would not prejudice their case for reopening the Berlin issue at a later date. They would expect in the long run to be able to exploit the alteration in Berlin's status achieved by introducing the UN into the picture for more far-reaching changes, gradually eroding the Allied position in the process.

In the short run, however, they seem bent on finding terms which they believe the West might be induced to accept and which they themselves could find palatable. This would of necessity also involve finding an agreement on access and, should the West remain adamant, probably could mean eventual Soviet acceptance of much of the Western access authority plan.

On the other hand, the Soviets will almost inevitably insist to the end on the "temporary" nature of any agreement, leaving the duration indefinite and not committing the USSR to any subsequent arrangement. How Moscow envisages the UN role it proposes remains totally unclear; the Soviet leaders themselves may be completely uncertain on this point and may not make a decision until they have had an opportunity to sound out Western limits of tolerance.

Soviet Concession

Khrushchev's remarks on Berlin [were clearly calculated to initiate a new round of negotiations on Berlin and Germany. Khrushchev's proposal that Western forces remain "temporarily" in the city but under a UN banner rather than national flags finally surfaced a long-expected variant on the troop presence issue. (The last major "variant", surfaced during the Khrushchev-Salinger conversation in May, involved substitution of Warsaw Pact and NATO contingents for the Allied forces. It was then diluted by various modifications in the course of subsequent negotiations.) The remainder/Khrushchev's Berlin remarks evidently summarized the present Soviet evaluation of the status of Berlin negotiations: that bilateral agreement has now more or less been reached on the question of German frontiers, on recognition of the existence of two Germanies and on a separate status for Berlin, and that the Soviets are thinking in terms of a free city with guaranteed (how guaranteed was not specified) communication routes to the outside world.

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The "only issue remaining",^{1/} according to the Soviet Premier, is the question of Western troop presence. He now proposes to resolve this question by a "concession" on the Soviet part — the USSR will no longer "dispute" the composition of the troop contingents and will consider the NATO base and occupation regime aspects of the present status suitably eliminated by the introduction of a UN aegis for the Allied forces presently and "temporarily" in Berlin.

Khrushchev apparently hopes his new proposition will be attractive enough to propel the US into serious negotiations ostensibly directed toward reaching an agreement in some form on Berlin. (The Soviets may have been impressed by allusions to the notion of leaving Western forces in Berlin in the guise of UN troops in some Western statements on Berlin since at least last March.) For the Soviets, the proposal does mark a significant backdown from earlier negotiating demands and is in one respect the first retreat from the stand of the June 4, 1961 aide-memoire, which envisaged a Soviet presence as well in West Berlin. However, Khrushchev's statement that "after this offer, little scope for concession remains on the Soviet side" need not be regarded too literally; he told Salinger much the same when he proposed his earlier variant.

And the Soviet Premier was careful not to detract from his concession by avoiding mention of any of the details which might prove disputatious in actual negotiations and which must be resolved before any agreement can be concluded: in what form would free access be guaranteed; how long was "temporary"; what would happen to the Allied position and Berlin's status

1. In reviewing the points upon which he claimed that agreement was already at hand, Khrushchev did not include the issue of non-diffusion of nuclear weapons, and he apparently did not mention the subject in the context of disarmament either. Moscow may be reconsidering its position, as expressed in the Rusk-Gromyko exchange, either because it feels that it has more to gain by pressing the issue of multilateral forces than by seeking an agreement which would leave the US freedom of action on this subject or perhaps because of manifest Chinese Communist opposition.

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after that period; and just what type of UN aegis was envisaged — a sanction from the New York headquarters, token presence of a UN representative, UN agency actually resident in Berlin, formal UN command of the Allied garrisons, or even an Allied command acting as a UN trustee. Khrushchev appeared concerned in the first instance to get talks going again by means of a new offer.

Immediate Soviet Objective: An Atmosphere of Détente.

Thus, it appears a US commitment to negotiations per se is the primary and immediate aim of the newest Soviet move. While the implications of the latest proposal have in themselves other and more far-reaching significance, the Soviets probably calculate that for the short term at least, a mere US involvement in formal negotiations toward a Berlin settlement would tend to inhibit American freedom to act or react vigorously there and in other areas — most notably in Cuba. Similarly, in Moscow's view, atmosphere of US-Soviet détente engendered by the existence of such negotiations (simultaneously, perhaps, with renewed serious negotiations on a nuclear test ban) would tend to dilute the unity of purpose in the Western alliance.

Furthermore, having once agreed to negotiate as a result of the new Soviet proposal, the US would, in the Soviet view, be at a considerable disadvantage should negotiating eventually prove fruitless or be stalemated — the surface "reasonableness" of the Soviet proposition and the element of a UN role in Berlin will probably find considerable world-wide support and the onus for rejecting it regardless of the circumstances, would then fall on the US.

Moreover, the USSR probably calculates that the opening of formal Berlin negotiations could serve to give impetus to exchanges on a variety of other issues of interest to the USSR. Khrushchev's reference to a NATO-Warsaw Pact nonaggression agreement suggests only one likely possibility; his remarks that the problem was "not Berlin but Germany" opens another broad range of issues for eventual consideration.

In sum, by seemingly giving up their previous demands for the removal or drastic change in the composition of Western forces in Berlin, the Soviets expect to commit the West to a new round of negotiations on Berlin (possibly even without a complete settlement of the Cuban affair). Such a commitment in turn would, in the Soviet view, promote a sense of détente which, among other things, might inhibit possible forceful US actions regarding Cuba, open up fissures within the Western alliance, and, more positively, give impetus to negotiations on broader issues of interest to the USSR. Moreover,

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Western agreement to discuss a UN presence in West Berlin would, in the Soviet view, introduce the Berlin issue into the UN where, at some time in the future, Moscow might hope to win substantial support on the Berlin issue.

Longer-Range Objectives

Beyond these short-term objectives, however, Berlin negotiations on the basis of the Soviet proposals would allow the USSR considerable maneuverability in terms of ultimate goals. Such talks could be exploited merely to postpone the need for action over a prolonged period or even indefinitely — in effect creating a modus vivendi which would reduce tensions over Berlin until a more auspicious time — or they could be directed toward finding an actual arrangement on Berlin — which would similarly freeze the status quo, more or less, for a time. In either case, the Soviets would not be seeking a final Berlin "settlement" but rather an arrangement which would allow them to return to the use of pressure at some later and more propitious date.

The UN. Negotiations directed toward introducing a UN presence into Berlin as the key element of a temporary modus vivendi in turn offer the Soviets advantageous prospects. Most obviously, an interim arrangement suitably formalized and accepted by the Western powers paves the way for a separate peace treaty with East Germany (and a resolution of that embarrassment in Soviet policy.) A pro forma treaty could then be concluded without risk or loss of prestige even if, for the moment, it altered little of the factual situation. The very fact that the Allies had agreed to superimpose a UN presence on the present occupation regime could be cited a major Soviet accomplishment (and for propaganda purposes as the end to the "NATO base" threat.)

Furthermore, the Soviets probably believe that to introduce the UN into the Berlin situation would, in the long run, produce substantial dividends. The USSR probably calculates that Western acceptance of a UN aegis for Allied troops, even only nominally, would over a period of time tend to erode the legal basis of the Western position in Berlin and Allied sovereignty in the city. A new element superimposed on the existing occupation rights not only would serve to dilute those rights by throwing their origin into question but would also add a fourth voice to any discussion of West Berlin policy considerations, already sufficiently complicated in tripartite form.

More significantly, however, a formal UN role, no matter how nominal, would introduce the Berlin issue inextricably into the UN forum. At some later date, the USSR could choose to exploit this involvement to exert pressure on the Western powers to dilute their prerogatives in Berlin in the interests of "peace" and "reduction of tension." And the Soviets probably assume an institutionalized UN presence would almost inevitably generate its own pressure on the Allied position, requiring further

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adjustments in the exercise of Western sovereignty in the city which in turn would further alter the Western position. It would in addition inhibit to a certain extent Western freedom to act or react in its own interests in Berlin matters. And in the crucial area of FRG-Berlin relationships, a UN presence would tend to underscore the separate status of Berlin and encourage evolution in the direction of a "free city". The immediacy of a West German commitment to West Berlin might thus over a period of time suffer serious erosion.

UN and the Free City. One additional dividend the Soviets probably expect from a UN role in West Berlin is the impetus it is likely to give the city's evolution into a "free city" in fact, if not in name. They are aware the West Berliners will almost certainly regard any surrender of Western prerogatives and sovereignty to an institutionalized UN presence as an indication of weakening Allied commitment to the city's future. They are probably similarly aware the city's viability in the last analysis is dependent not on the volume of economic assistance pumped in but on the population's conviction West Berlin has a future both as an intrinsic part of the Federal Republic and the Western world and as the potential capital of an eventually reunited Germany.

Introduction of the UN into the city may well alleviate certain of Berlin's economic problems in the immediate future by providing an increased sense of physical security to existing enterprises. In the long run, however, the Soviets probably estimate the economic facts of life in Berlin — limited labor force, isolated location, aging population — will tend to discourage private Western investment in the city's future and also dissipate the internal dynamic Berlin formerly enjoyed by reason of its sense of mission. The gradual lessening of the Western economic commitment would, for the Soviets, mean in effect the gradual evolution of West Berlin into the "free city" the USSR desires. Under the circumstances, the Soviets could accede to the continuing presence of Western garrisons as a face-saving gesture for the West; they would expect to garner in return increases stresses within the structure of the NATO alliance and possibly greater influence over the future orientation of West German foreign policy as it became apparent the Western stake in Berlin was disintegrating.

Specific Aspects of a Berlin Agreement

Khrushchev's proposition [] mentioned none of the many technical issues to be resolved before any Berlin arrangement can be realized. He presented only an ostensible concession in the Soviet position; the very term "concession" suggests he probably expects compensations. The Soviets will probably attempt to find immediate payment in the area of access, while reserving their right to raise other demands later on the basis of the "temporary" nature of the arrangement.

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Access. Soviet negotiators have not yet accepted the Western access authority proposal and remain committed to their own version of an arbitration authority. They will probably attempt initially to persuade the US to accept their version as the price for their own "concession". However, if the Soviets are seriously determined to find an interim arrangement on Berlin, they will probably come a considerable distance toward the Western plan, although only after hard bargaining to expand the GDR's role in any access regime. But the USSR could also utilize the access issue to stall, complicate, and divert the negotiations themselves; furthermore, Western refusal to accept "technicalities" of the Soviet plan could be juxtaposed to the "reasonableness" of the Soviet "concession" on troop presence to exert UN pressure on the Western negotiators to settle on Soviet terms.

Duration. Similarly, the meaning of "temporary" in any Berlin arrangement can lead to innumerable complications, and the question of a time limit affords the Soviets a variety of exploitable opportunities. They can, of course, be expected to press vigorously for a specific deadline and as limited a time span as they can possibly achieve. More significantly, however, they will probably refuse, as they always have, to commit themselves on the specifics of Berlin's status once the "temporary" period ends. Previous Soviet behavior in Berlin negotiations indicates the USSR will agree only to an arrangement which leaves this future status unresolved and undefined.

UN Role. Nor have the Soviets ever given any indication of what they mean by a UN flag¹ over the Allied garrisons. They have spoken only of a Berlin agreement and German peace treaty being deposited with the UN. Should negotiations now develop out of the newest Soviet proposal, the form of the UN involvement could be the subject of lengthy debate. Whatever the form - token or real, supervisory or integrally woven into the chain of command, resident agent or delegating the Allied command to act as trustee - the USSR will be concerned that it curtail or impose on Allied interests in Berlin as much as possible without interfering with the Soviet position in East Berlin and Germany.

Having assumed himself the role of advocate of a UN presence, Khrushchev probably now intends to force on the US the onus for opposing that presence in any specific form he may choose to propose. And having agreed to negotiate on a UN role, the US will, in the Soviet view, be compelled to negotiate defensively from the start since the initiative for formally introducing the entire subject lies with the USSR.

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1. We are preparing a separate Research Memorandum dealing with the implications of various possible Soviet proposals for the precise form of a UN aegis for the presence of Western troops in Berlin.

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